



*Chairman:* Mr. Abdul Samad GHAUS  
(Afghanistan).

**AGENDA ITEM 35**

**United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine  
Refugees in the Near East: report of the Commissioner-  
General (continued) (A/8013, A/8040, A/8084 and  
Add.1, A/SPC/140)**

1. Mr. EREN (Turkey) said that he would take an unorthodox approach by appealing to the members of the Committee to divest themselves of politics. The day before, the General Assembly had set an example of compassion by standing united in the face of the catastrophe which had stricken Pakistan; he hoped that members would display the same solidarity with respect to the catastrophe facing the Palestine refugees.
2. The Committee, whose inability to resolve the refugee issue was a source of sorrow and regret for all, again had before it the report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/8013). The grievances suffered by the Palestinian refugees for more than two decades were well known and were deeply felt, he was certain, by all Member States represented in the Committee. Their suffering was also fully shared by the Turkish people and Government, especially since the two peoples were united by historical, traditional and religious ties as well as geographical proximity. The Turkish people had been involved in the life of the region for more than a millennium. He had accordingly felt prompted to take the floor at such an early stage in order to appeal to all members to give urgent consideration to the question with a view to seeking ways of alleviating the ordeal of the Palestinian refugees.
3. He stressed the importance of the role of UNRWA, which provided the only available means of channelling efforts to assist the Palestinian refugees. He paid tribute to the untiring efforts of the Commissioner-General and his staff for their extremely effective utilization of limited means in the performance of their difficult task. In the statement he had made at the 726th meeting, the Commissioner-General had said that financial problems threatened the very future of the Agency. That being so, he would follow the example of the representative of Syria (727th meeting) and address himself primarily to the financial and humanitarian aspects of the complex problem before the Committee.
4. The Committee had been aware of the serious financial difficulties facing UNRWA for a number of years, and prospects for improving the situation had been discussed at length. It was now clear that no substantial progress had been made in that direction. On the contrary, the deficit of the Agency had continued to increase and had reached a critical level, endangering the Agency's very existence. According to the annex to document A/8084/Add.1, the deficit had reached \$5 million in 1970, and was expected to rise to \$6.5 million in 1971. Moreover, as the Secretary-General had indicated in his letter dated 13 August 1970 (A/8040), UNRWA would be unable to meet its cash obligations beyond the first months of 1971, and its obligations would in effect exceed its cash assets by the end of the current year. Thus, as the Commissioner-General had said in his statement annexed to that letter, unless the General Assembly acted at the current session, the structure of the Agency would very likely have disintegrated by the twenty-sixth session.
5. His delegation accepted the Commissioner-General's assurances that the Agency had thoroughly and carefully examined all possibilities of reducing expenditures. Since all possible reductions had already been made in secondary services, any further programme reductions would have to be made in vital services which were already operated at a minimal level. Food rations, for example, were maintained at an inadequate level of 1,500 calories per day in summer and 1,600 calories per day in winter, and relief services still accounted for one third of the Agency's budget. Health services provided the bare minimum necessary for sanitation and the prevention of epidemics, and according to the Commissioner-General's report (A/8013) even the distribution of soap had had to be discontinued.
6. The question of education deserved special attention, since it was the key to a brighter future for the refugees, a fact of which the latter were fully aware. He therefore viewed with great concern the Commissioner-General's statement to the effect that any further reductions required would have to be made in education and that that would mean closing many schools. The Committee could not in good conscience allow the next generation of refugees to inherit the sufferings of its parents. In that context, he noted with some satisfaction that secondary school certificate examinations had been given to some 7,000 students in the Gaza Strip. Like the Commissioner-General, his delegation considered that a good example of international co-operation under extremely unfavourable circumstances. In that connexion, he wished to express his admiration for the sincere and helpful efforts of UNESCO, which had set other specialized agencies a fine example.
7. He was convinced that a consensus existed regarding the need to overcome UNRWA's current financial crisis. The Commissioner-General had provided a list of the possible

alternatives in his note on that subject a year before.<sup>1</sup> Without recommending any particular one among them, he wished again to draw the Committee's attention to those possibilities, namely: (a) increased aid from other United Nations organs and specialized agencies; (b) an expanded list of contributing Governments; (c) the transfer of part of the Agency's expenses to the United Nations budget; (d) an increase in the existing level of voluntary contributions by Governments; (e) increased contributions from non-governmental private resources. He noted in connexion with (d) that the majority of Member States had not yet made contributions, and expressed the hope that they would offer support, at the present very critical stage, for the collective humanitarian effort to assist the Palestine refugees. As to (e) he pointed out that private funds available for humanitarian purposes had greatly increased in volume, and efforts to divert an increasing proportion of such funds to the cause of the refugees could well prove worth while.

8. His delegation hoped that the possibility of further programme reductions or of the discontinuation of subsidy payments to Governments would be ruled out.

9. In the context of the concrete suggestions for easing the Agency's financial burden that he had just mentioned, he drew the Committee's attention to the existence in Jericho of thousands of unused empty shelters, together with schools, health centres, food distribution centres and other installations, as noted in paragraph 8 of the annex to document A/8084. His delegation was convinced that if the Palestinians who had been displaced as a result of the hostilities in 1967 were allowed to return to their homes, as envisaged in numerous resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, the existing financial situation would be greatly improved.

10. Those considerations had prompted the Turkish Government to increase its voluntary contribution to UNRWA by 50 per cent during the past year. His Government was well aware of the gravity of the situation, and was prepared to consider, within the limits of its modest means, other possibilities for increasing its share in the discharge of the collective responsibility.

11. The situation of the Palestinian refugees constituted an essential element in the problem of an over-all settlement of the Middle East question. Recent developments in that area had underscored the possible far-reaching political repercussions of the refugee problem. Members should not, however, be discouraged by the slow pace of progress towards a settlement; for the time being, the humanitarian aspects of the question far outweighed other considerations.

12. He expressed his conviction that wisdom, will and reason would prevail and that the tragedy which would result from the dismantling of UNRWA would be averted. Conscience dictated that the Agency's financial crisis must be overcome.

13. Mrs. AFKHAMI (Iran) said that she wished first of all to express her delegation's sincere appreciation of the efforts and dedication of the Commissioner-General and his staff under circumstances of unusual difficulty.

14. The problem of the Palestinian refugees was now almost as old as the United Nations itself. For the past twenty-two years, the United Nations had considered the tragic situation every year, issuing statements and resolutions, while new problems arose, new needs became apparent and the main solution seemed further out of reach than before. One thing was obvious, however: the tragic human dimension of the refugees' plight and the depth of their suffering. UNRWA, facing the tremendous difficulties of an international agency with particularly sensitive functions to perform within the areas of sovereign States, had been of the utmost service in making the refugees' lot more bearable.

15. The Agency's work had been excellent in the area of medical services and health care, and standards of health care, disease prevention and immunization had been maintained at a level no lower than that which existed in the neighbouring countries. In the field of education, which accounted for half the Agency's staff and 45 per cent of its budget, the progress of its work had been adversely affected by circumstances beyond its control. The shortage of space, teachers and textbooks had also hampered the programme of education in all areas. Needless to say, education was one of the most important segments of the Agency's activity, and although a certain amount of progress had been made in that area, much remained to be accomplished. As to general relief services, the Commissioner-General had reported that the number of refugees listed with the Agency had increased by 2.2 per cent, while the number of UNRWA rations had decreased by 0.4 per cent. Thus, only 58.7 per cent of the registered refugees had received rations in June 1970. The Commissioner-General had further reported that because the Agency maintained a limit on the maximum number of ration recipients in each country, no allowance being made for population increase, there were over 200,000 children over the age of one year for whom no rations were available. Noting the complex political, psychological and financial problems confronting the Agency, summarized in paragraphs 30 and 31 of the Commissioner-General's report (A/8013), she emphasized the importance of UNRWA in improving the lot of the refugees. However, the Agency's financial situation had deteriorated to a point where its very survival was at stake. Her delegation appealed to all nations to do their utmost to provide the financial and material assistances required for the Agency's operations.

16. The Iranian Government's position on the question of the Palestinian refugees was quite clear. It had supported all resolutions which had been proposed to improve their conditions. In addition, it had always supported the Commissioner-General in his efforts, and would continue to do so. For the sake of more than one million homeless people, the peace and welfare of the people of the Middle East and the future effectiveness of the United Nations, her delegation hoped that the coming year would see the Organization dealing more effectively with the problem of the Palestinian refugees.

<sup>1</sup> See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fourth Session, Annexes*, agenda item 36, document A/SPC/134.

17. It was unacceptable that over a million people should live as refugees all their lives and that their children should be born, grow up and pass away with no status or nationality other than that of wards of the United Nations. No matter how successful the Agency was in carrying out its functions in the future, it must be borne in mind that a general and permanent solution had to be found and that an effective and substantial change in the situation of the refugees was of primary importance to the welfare of the entire area.

18. Speaking in the context of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967, which her Government had supported whole-heartedly and which offered a viable solution to the problem of the Palestine refugees, she concluded by reiterating her delegation's hope that Ambassador Jarring's mission would be resumed and that his efforts would meet with success in the coming year.

*The meeting rose at 4.5 p.m.*